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ABSTRACT

Assertive training is a set of procedures that the counselor can use to help clients, in particular women, to achieve a greater sense of freedom and personal satisfaction in a wide variety of life situations. Especially in the world of work, the occupational behavior of women is often hampered not only by existing structural barriers but also by their own concept of themselves as passive dependent human beings. This paper examines the assertion training model and its coverage of four major stages in which the participants are helped to: (1) distinguish assertion from aggression and nonassertion from politeness; (2) develop a belief system to support assertive behavior; (3) develop skills for dealing with excessive emotions which interfere with assertive behavior and other internal obstacles to assertive behavior; and (4) develop assertive skills through active practice models. (YRJ).

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HELPING WOMEN DEVELOP ASSERTIVE SKILLS:

A FOUR STAGE COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL APPROACH

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In their occupational behavior, women are often hampered not only by the existing structural barriers in the world of work but also by their own concept of themselves as passive, dependent human beings. For example, in considering various kinds of work, they may limit their choices to that narrow range of careers deemed suitable for women. In applying for jobs, they may exhibit a lack of self-confidence and a deference that practically assures their being placed in low-status, low-paying positions. And, once they have a job, they may find themselves victimized in different ways and yet be totally unable to improve their situation; indeed, they may be all too willing to assume the role of a helpless victim who must accept whatever fate -- and those in authority -- dole out to them.

It is the task of the counselor to introduce clients to new ways of thinking and behaving, to open up to them new career possibilities, and to teach them new interpersonal skills that will result in more healthy and positive functioning in the world of work. My purpose here is to acquaint counselors with assertion training, a set of procedures that can help clients -- and particularly women -- become more free to explore, enter, and function more adequately in nontraditional careers. Over the last few years, women have grown steadily more interested in assertion training as a result of three converging trends (Jakubowski-Spector, 1973a). The first is the widespread acceptance of the cultural imperative for self-growth; as women come to assess their own potential for growth, they discover that the difficulty they may have in tolerating interpersonal conflicts and in standing up for their own rights is an obstacle to their achieving greater self-fulfillment. The second trend is the growing flexibility of sex roles, which has led women to experiment with different role behaviors; as they step outside the home and are exposed to new situations, especially in the area of employment, they discover previously unsuspected inadequacies in their interpersonal skills. The third trend is the growth of the women's movement and the resulting stimulation of awareness and self-examination; as women strive to become strong and effective as well as to be feminine, they may find themselves unprepared to live up to these aspirations. One major limitation is an inability to be as assertive as they would like. Thus, there has been a growing demand for training in assertive skills. (For a review of the theory, history, and practice of assertive training, see Rimm and Masters, 1974).

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My discussion of the assertion training model covers four major stages in which the participants are helped to: (1) distinguish assertion from aggression and nonassertion from politeness; (2) develop a belief system to support assertive behavior; (3) develop skills for dealing with exessive emotions which interfere with assertive behavior and other internal obstacles to assertive behavior; and (4) develop assertive skills through active practice methods.

STAGE ONE

The distinctions between assertion, aggression, and nonassertion should be clarified at the outset, particularly since people often confuse the first two types of interpersonal behavior. Briefly, assertion involves standing up for oneself in such a way that the rights of another person are violated; and nonassertion involves failing to stand up for one's rights or expressing oneself in such a self-effacing, submissive manner that, in consequence, one's rights are easily violated by others.

In contrast, assertive behavior carries with it not only feelings of power but also the likelihood of changing other people's behavior without the hard feelings that are associated with aggression. While aggression is an attempt to dominate, humiliate, or put down the other person, assertion conveys respect for oneself and a proper and appropriate respect -- not deference -- toward the other person. Of six types of assertive behavior, four will be described here. The remaining ones can be found in Responsible Assertive Behavior (Lange and Jakubowski,1976). The first involves basic assertion, a simple statement of one's feelings, thoughts, and opinions or an affirmation of one's rights. For instance, when a woman is waiting in line to be served at a hot dog stand and the clerk mistakenly starts to take someone else's order first, she may assert herself simply by saying firmly, but not coldly, "I believe I was here first."

A second type of assertion makes use of "I" statements and involves (a) making a non-blameful description of the other person's behavior, (b) describing the concrete and specific effects of the other person's behavior, (c) stating one's own feelings, and (d) stating ones wants or preferences. For example: "When you're late to work in the morning, I have to take extra time to re-arrange the other employee's work schedules. This is taking time away from things I need to do. And I'm starting to feel both concerned and irritated. I'd like to know what's causing you to be late so frequently and how you're going to take care of this problem."

A third type of assertion combines basic assertion with empathy whereby one first acknowledges the other person's feelings or situation and then continues to make the assertive statement. One says, in essence, "I recognize where you're at, and here's where I'm at." For example, this type of behavior is particularly important to women since it enables them to maintain the satisfying, positive aspect of their stereotypic feminine role

behavior (that is, being sensitive and understanding) while eliminating the destructive aspects of such behavior (that is, being compliant, deferent, submissive). Empathic assertions are useful when the relationship with the other person is important, when one wants to reduce the chances that the other person will become defensive or feel hurt, or when one simple wants to convey understanding but at the same time preserve one's integrity.

Confrontive assertion is a fourth type, to be used when other people's words are discrepant with their actions. It involves a three-part statement: (a) pointing out what the other person said he(she) would do, in a nonevaluative way, (b) describing what he (she), in fact, did do, and (c) describing what you want or prefer. For example, when an employer has promised a raise but failed to follow through, the woman may assertively confront the employer and say: "I understood from our last talk that I would receive a raise in three months. I've been working here for four months, and I haven't got the raise yet. I think my work has been satisfactory. Unless there's some problem I'm not aware of, I would appreciate your taking whatever steps are necessary so that the raise will be included in my next paycheck." When a supervisor is giving lots of unsolicited advice, an empathic assertion would be saying, "I know that you give me advice because you don't want me to get hurt by mistakes I might make. At this point, I need to learn how to make my own decisions and rely on myself. I appreciate the help you've given me in the past and you can help me now by not giving me advice."

When women can act assertively, they feel an increased sense of self-confidence and self-respect; moreover, they generally find that other people respect them more. Their assertion not only results in the greater likelihood of having their needs and desires satisfied but also provides more authentic and beneficial ways of relating to other people.

Participants can learn to distinguish assertion from aggression, and nonassertion from politeness by reading basic assertion books i.e. Alberti and Emmons, Your Perfect Right and through participating in a descrimination exercise. In this exercise, women listen to a series of audio taped statements and after silently deciding whether the statement is assertive, agressive, or nonassertive, the trainer leads a group discussion in which misunderstandings about the concepts are identified and changed. For example,

Situation	Response
A married man persists in asking you out for a date, saying, "Come on, honey, what harm can it do to go to lunch with me just this once"? She responds.	I like our relationship the way it is. I wouldn't feel confortable with any kind of dating relationship -- and that includes lunch.
You have set aside 4:00 to 5:00 for things you want or need to do. Someone asks you to see you at that time. You say	Well, uh, I can see you at that time. It's 4:00 Monday then. Are you really sure that's a good time for you?

Other situations may be taken from the Jakubowski Discrimination-Test which is described more fully in Lange and Jakubowski (1976).

STAGE TWO

As a basic step toward helping a nonassertive woman to become more free in her career choices and more effective in her occupational behavior, the counselor must help her to develop a system of personal beliefs that will support and justify assertive behavior. Mere exhortation and encouragement are not enough. The counselor must work to break down the old belief system -- often a difficult task in view of the pervasiveness of sex-role sterotypes -- and to replace the old system with more accurate messages that emphasize the client's basic human rights and that more realistically define her responsibilities toward other people.

Most of the interpersonal rights are very simple; indeed, naturally assertive people usually act on them without even regarding them as rights. But the woman conditioned to act nonassertively may need to have them pointed out to her. Interpersonal rights are best identified in the context of discussing specific situations in which the client has failed to act nonassertively. Through the technique of group discussion, the client may be enabled to arrive at a more accurate assessment of her rights and may be strengthened in asserting them. Among the basic human interpersonal rights that might be considered are the following:

- to make mistakes
- to refuse requests without having to feel guilty or selfish
- to feel and express anger
- to feel and express a healthy competitiveness and achievement drive
- to ask for affection and help
- to have one's opinions given the same respect and consideration that other people's opinions are given
- to be treated as a capable adult and not patronized
- to use one's own judgment in deciding which needs are most important to fulfill
- to have one's needs regarded as important as other people's
- to tell someone else what one's needs are
- to make demands on other people occasionally

Each of these assertive rights, has certain limitations and responsibilities. For example, the right to make a mistake has the accompanying responsibilities of acknowledging that you made a mistake instead of blaming your mistake on other people; where possible, rectifiying your mistakes; changing your behavior and not making the same mistake over and over again; and accepting other people's rights to make mistakes as well.

In addition to the conviction that she has certain basic rights she is entitled to exercise, the woman should hold two other convictions. The first is that she will be happier if she appropriately exercises her rights. When people learn how to become assertive, more is involved than a simple change in behavior; they are also changing the way in which they interact with others and the way they feel about themselves; indeed, their whole value structure may change. As women learn to accept their own thoughts and feelings -- even when those are different from what they are "supposed" to think and feel -- their self-concept should improve and their personal happiness increase.

The other conviction is that nonassertion is hurtful in the long run. It hurts the woman herself because it prevents her from developing fully and freely and because it results in feelings of frustration, anger, and helplessness. It damages her interpersonal relations in that it prevents her from sharing her genuine thoughts and feelings, limiting the degree of closeness and intimacy that she might achieve with other people.

Thus, these four convictions -- the inalienability of certain basic human rights, the responsibilities attached to their rights, the rewards of assertion, the hurtfulness of nonassertion -- are a necessary part of the belief system that must be developed as a foundation for assertive behavior.

STAGE THREE

Because so many women equate nonassertiveness with femininity and confuse assertion with aggression, they may need special help in overcoming the fears connected with acting assertively. The most frequent psychological barrier are fears of hurting other people, fear of looking foolish, and fear of expressing anger. The woman may often be unaware of her specific anxieties, troubled by vague feelings that assertive behavior is in some way wrong. The counselor can help her develop an awareness of these obstacles by means of an exercise that requires her to complete such sentences as the following:

- My greatest strength is . . .
- I could help myself be more assertive by . . .
- When I'm assertive, I . . .
- If I didn't have to worry about my femininity, I . . .

- I hesitate to show my affection because . . .
- I hesitate to show my anger because . . .
- I stop myself from being assertive by. . . .

When irrational fears function as genuine obstacles to acting assertively, the counselor can use any one of several techniques for reducing these anxieties. One of the most common is rational-emotive therapy, whereby the client's irrational beliefs are directly attacked. For instance, fear of hurting another person's feelings can be examined rationally by asking such questions as: "Can the other person live through the hurt?" "Does hurting someone else's feelings necessarily mean that I am wrong?" "What steps can I take to repair the hurt?" As the woman comes to see that her standards are unrealistic -- that it is impossible never to hurt another human being -- her anxiety will be reduced. (For a more complete description of rational-emotive techniques, see Ellis, 1962; Ellis and Harper, 1961, Lange & Jakubowski, 1976).

Emotive imagery can also be used to help reduce anticipatory anxiety; this involves training the client to imagine situations and scenes that arouse anxiety inhibiting emotions such as confidence, affection, pride, and mirth. The woman can also be taught to redirect her anger so that is aimed not against the other person but against her own fear and anxiety (Jakubowski-Spector, 1973b). Finally, behavior rehearsal -- a technique for training in assertive skills -- may also prove useful in reducing anxiety about assertion in two ways. First, as the client perceives her increasing skill in handling difficult role-play experiences, her confidence increases. Second, as the client learns, in the course of role play, that nothing catastrophic happens when she enacts the assertive response, her irrational anxiety diminishes.

STAGE FOUR

Although assertive training programs have not yet been developed to the point where they can be called "skill training" programs according to a strict definition of that term, the foundations for a more systematic approach are rapidly being laid. (See, for instance, McFall and Twentyman 1973; Galassi, Kostka, & Galassi, 1975). One promising technique for teaching assertive skills is modeling, in which the therapist acts out adequate assertive responses. More common is behavior rehearsal, a special kind of role-playing procedure in which the client practices or rehearses those specific assertive responses that are to become a part of her behavioral repertoire. This function of role-playing contrasts with its original function in psychodrama, where it is used for catharsis or insight. Many exercises that can be used in group situations are described in Lange and Jakubowski (1976).

One variant of the behavior rehearsal procedure consists first of the counselor's explaining to the client how behavior rehearsal may help her to acquire assertive skills. Then, the counselor and client together devise

the first role play; they select a significant encounter (past or future) in which the client has has difficulty responding assertively. In the first role play ; the client plays herself, whereas the counselor plays the other person, following the directions given by the client. (If the counselor feels that he/she may have trouble playing the other person, the client may be asked to demonstrate the other person's behavior). The client is told to role-play as though the scene were happening right then and there. Care must be taken to ensure that the counselor does not play the role of other person in such a way as to overwhelm the client with feelings of failure or anxiety. Following the first role play, the counselor asks the client to give her reactions to the performance, including suggestions about possible alternative responses.

The next step is a role-play reversal, in which the client plays the other person and the therapist plays the client, demonstrating more effective role-play behavior. In the discussion that follows, the client should be encouraged to evaluate the domonstrated behaviors to determine which she can best adopt. (If, after the first role play, the client clearly indicates that she is now ready to change her performance, the role-play reversal may be dropped). In the third role play, the situation is again enacted with the client playing herself and practicing the more effective assertive responses that have been demonstrated and discussed. In successive role plays, increasingly difficult encounters are portrayed. After each role play, the counselor and client should discuss what has happened, with the counselor always reinforcing the client with praise and providing positive feedback before offering a limited amount of corrective feedback, bolstered by concrete suggestions for improvement. The counselor should also check, after each role play, to make sure that the client is not overcome by feelings of anxiety.

Gradually, the client's performance is shaped until she can comfortably and effectively role-play the particular situation. At this point, consideration should be given to how the client can try out her newly acquired assertive skills in the "real world." It is vital that the client meet with success rather than failure in these first crucial experiences. Therefore, these situations must be carefully screened so as to maximize success and minimize failure.

As an aid to assertive training, particularly in group situations, a stimulus film (Jakubowski-Spector, Pearlman & Coburn 1973); has been developed presenting a series of vignettes of assertive situations. Each vignette is designed to elicit the emotions of the audience, to remind the viewers of similar situations they have faced, to stimulate discussion, and to serve as a springboard for practicing assertive responses.

Conclusion

Assertion training is a set of procedures that the counselor can use to help clients -- and especially women -- to achieve greater freedom and personal satisfaction in a wide variety of life situations. One particular area where this procedure can be valuable is the world of work. Partly

because of the socially inculcated attitude that the "ideal" woman is dependent, passive, and nonassertive, women have typically restricted their choices to a narrow range of careers, mostly at low levels, and have moreover, permitted themselves to be treated unreasonably and unfairly in job situations. By developing a belief system that includes the recognition that they have certain basic human rights, by learning how to overcome the psychological barriers that stand in the way of assertiveness, and by becoming adept at assertive skills, women may go a long way toward achieving greater personal development.

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